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ABSTRACT

The relationship between the schools and the press who reports about them is the subject of this paper. It contains four speeches made at a 1973 meeting of the Council for Basic Education held in Washington D.C. Two school officials and two journalists offer their views on such subjects as training for educational writers, press bias, and the role of school officials and the press in disseminating information. A brief discussion among the individual participants is presented at the end. (Author/LD)

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The Schools and the Press

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The Schools and the Press

This paper contains most of the remarks made at a meeting sponsored by the Council for Basic Education which was held in Washington on Friday afternoon, October 19, 1973. The moderator of the meeting was Jacques Barzun, a member of CBE's board of directors. The invited audience consisted of members of the Washington Chapter of the Educational Press Association, local members of the Education Writers Association, and educators from the Washington area.

Jacques Barzun

There is a great advantage in being a small, intimate and private group for the discussion of such a difficult, and in some ways, touchy subject as that which we have before us. You will perhaps agree with me that there are certain relations in life that are inherently antagonistic. By inherently I mean that quite apart from the character of those in the relation, opposition exists: husband and wife, parent and child, author and publisher are relations of that sort. They are antagonistic not because the people involved in them are particularly aggressive, but because by the nature of their duty they see the world differently from each other and have divergent purposes. They also have some common purposes but these are not the main ones. By contrast with such relations think of two persons in a business partnership, or in the relation of teacher and student. There the object of the pair is the same. There may be a clash, but on grounds other than the relationship itself. It has long since seemed to me that the relation of the news reporter and the people who are sources of news is one of those inherently antagonistic relations. The best indication I can give that this is true is my seeing in the office of a great newspaper, where I was visiting a friend, a notice posted saying, "In reporting at any length a man's speech, it is desirable before the end to make some reference to the main subject of his speech." It sounds funny, but it gives you a clue to the whole relationship: the speaker is interested in the main subject of his speech. The newsman is interested in the provocative or unusual or new remark that is made in the course of that speech. Both sides thereafter have a great deal to complain of in each other. News reporters, as my friends who are such tell me,

are lied to all the time—by people who want to keep things from the news and by people who want to get things into the news, to promote some idea. The person who is interviewed, or decried by the journalist, feels that the newsman has no sympathy with *his* aims and *his* promotable ideas, and so they clash. We might say, perhaps, that on the subject of education there is less tension between the parties, but that is a subject I want to leave to the panelists.

The first speaker on the panel is Gene I. Maeroff, who is an education writer for *The New York Times*. He is a graduate of Ohio University, with a master's degree from Boston University. He was on the staff of several newspapers in the Middle West before coming to New York, and he has written articles on education for several magazines, both literary and educational.

Gene I. Maeroff

Imagine, if you will, a school system of 1,100,000 pupils, a number that is staggering. It is, of course, the enrollment of the New York City public schools, and it is readily apparent that covering such a monster from the point of view of a newspaper reporter is virtually impossible, regardless of how conscientious or capable the reporter. Now try to think what would happen if all of a sudden that school system were split into thirty-two parts, each with about twenty to twenty-five thousand pupils—thirty-two separate school systems, each one of which is bigger than the average school system in the United States. That is what happened when decentralization was instituted in New York City three years ago. You may think that the task of covering the schools became easier after decentralization, but this is not what happened. One reason is manpower: there are just so many bodies that newspaper editors are going to assign to cover education. It doesn't matter if there is one school system, thirty-two, sixty-five or a hundred and sixty-five, priorities are set and newspaper editors are just going to parcel out so much manpower for education. A second reason is space. There is a limited amount of space in any newspaper and only a certain amount of that space is going to go for education unless a crisis develops. Another reason why it was not any easier to cover education after decentralization began is that there were more administrators, more bureaucracies, and many more possibilities for things to go wrong.

For the average school system there is just one avenue around this obstacle of manpower and space limitation. It is possible to have a

racial confrontation in your school—that will assure you of coverage. You could have the superintendent or one of the high school principals ban some books, and that might assure you of coverage. Or a teachers' strike—that's a good way to get coverage. The point is that a great deal of what is called education news in newspapers in the United States is crisis oriented, and if it weren't for the crisis it wouldn't get in and if it weren't for the crisis that school system wouldn't be mentioned at all. Take away the crisis and you lose the reporter. I am not going to try to make excuses for this kind of news coverage because there are things going on on both sides of it, but I would like to suggest some explanations as to why it happens. First of all, it is not really different from the way that many other subjects are covered. If you think about the different kinds of beats that are covered by a newspaper you realize that when there are crises that is the news that gets in the paper, and this is what happens in education as well. Moreover, since so much of what is written about education is what we call in the business "soft news," that is, something that is not of a pressing urgency to get into the paper, there is a tendency by editors to postpone it, to postpone the writing of it, and even once it is written to postpone running it in the paper. It may sit for weeks in what we call "overset" in type. There is now a serious shortage of newsprint, further limiting the amount of space that is available for stories.

Let me give you an example of how this crisis coverage works. On Wednesday of this week I thought I was going to be able to spend the day working on feature-type material on education, something in which we wouldn't have to worry about crises and could get into the guts of education. What happened was something else. The night before, on Tuesday night, at a boisterous meeting on the Lower East Side in Community School District Number One, the community school board had suspended the superintendent, Luis Fuentes, who is a very controversial figure. At two o'clock on Wednesday afternoon, hell was beginning to break loose in that community school district and it was readily apparent that there was a breaking news story that had to be covered. This is an example of what happens—and it should have been covered, of course—but the reason I point this out to you is that it is an example of what happens to intervene and put aside other kinds of education writing. So everything was dropped and we went after the story. I rushed about New York City for two and a half hours, got back to the office at five o'clock, most of the facts in hand, and I had to turn out the story in about an hour because the deadline had been moved up since there was a war in the Middle East.

This is the way things work. There was a boycott beginning in the district of 17,000 pupils, 11,000 of whom did not show up for school yesterday. I turned out the story in an hour and the next day, which I had also been expecting to spend on soft news—yesterday—I was back in District One covering the boycott. This is the way it should be, really, because this *has* to be covered. This is a breaking news story and it cannot be put aside, but it gives you an idea of what an education writer faces. I am not complaining, because the story got on page one and that makes newspaper writers feel good.

In the whole scheme of things it seems that outside of these crises, many editors do not give a very high priority to education news. You have to realize that my remarks are a mix of how *The New York Times* and similar newspapers cover education and how other newspapers that do not have the same resources and same commitment, which is most of the newspapers in the United States, cover education. And all of the newspapers, whether it is the *Times* or some very different kinds of newspapers, have the situation where not all editors think that education is that important a thing to get into the paper. The average metropolitan area has not only the major urban school system within its area to cover, but also dozens of suburban systems, which may range in size from a few thousand pupils to tens of thousands, with usually at least a half-dozen colleges and universities to be covered in the same locale. And education news means the news that is generated by institutions of higher education as well as the lower schools. If there have been a number of stories from colleges and universities in the paper—and I realize that many of the people in this audience are slanted toward elementary and secondary education—it doesn't necessarily hold water to say we can now go ahead with some stories on elementary and secondary education because an editor will argue that we have had education news lately, let's ease off a little bit. And he doesn't really care that much whether it was a college or an elementary school.

I do not think that this means that people in a school system or people at a particular college should despair and give up any hope of getting anything in the paper. It does mean there should be a recognition of reality, though. Each school system or institution of higher education should take the wide view and appreciate what is involved in the over-all scope of coverage of the newspaper and what the reporter is expected to do. A difficulty, it seems, is that often a principal or superintendent or some other school person will ask—

and I think that most people who have worked on daily newspapers have heard this lament—why don't you write about the good things? Such a reference often pertains to stories that show educators and educational institutions and pupils in a favorable light. It could mean other things, but I have found that that is something that people have in mind when they talk about good news. The good news idea is a simplistic notion that I think its proponents would be better off discarding. My suggestion instead would be try to get local education writers, whatever the locale, to produce articles that show perceptiveness and an understanding on their part of what they are writing about. If the result is adverse, so be it. It is not the job of education writers to praise or tear down. I do not see it that way although I know that some people associated with schools do see it that way. It is important for an education writer to have a critical eye—not a cynical eye, a critical eye. The articles will then speak for themselves. If they are truthful and intelligently written and comprehensive, it will be up to the reader to decide whether the result is critical or complimentary.

Many, many newspapers in this country have special writers working in the field of education. At the smaller papers, the education assignment may be combined with covering the police beat, with covering two or three other beats, and it is not really a specialty as such except that when there is an education story this person might get it, but frequently the so-called education writer will be covering many other things. This is another thing that people who are trying to get education news in the paper ought to appreciate, and I suspect these remarks would cover a good many of the papers in the United States. At larger papers usually there is at least one person with the full-time responsibility of covering education. We have four people at *The New York Times* who work exclusively in the field of education writing. I do not know of any other paper that has more. But even four people don't really go very far when you think of what there is to cover in New York. I mentioned 1,100,000 pupils. They attend over 900 schools—about 95 high schools—and most of these schools, most of these pupils, are just not going to get into the paper during the year. It is illogical to imagine that they are going to. And then, on top of this, there are 25,000 students in New York City attending independent schools, and the Archdiocese of New York has an enrollment of 190,000 in its schools, which makes it much larger than most school systems. Then there are many, many more youngsters, of course, in the schools in the surrounding suburban areas. The reason

I cite these figures is to give you an idea of the magnitude of what there is to be covered and of the likelihood of any particular school being mentioned or being the subject of a story throughout a year.

At the *Times* we have been experimenting for almost a year on a device to try to get coverage that will at least mention some of the things that are going on in high schools and in colleges that might not otherwise get in the paper. It runs every week. One week it is called Campus Notes and the next week, High School Notes. It is not a bulletin board type of thing; we try to talk about trends, about things that have happened that are a little bit out of the ordinary. It is not very difficult to write the Campus Notes column because colleges are pretty well geared toward turning out news releases and many colleges have very competent people, if sometimes a bit too prolific. With the high schools it is another problem because high schools do not have people, generally, who turn out news releases, so we have to scrape for that, we have to get on the telephone to the high schools and ask them what is happening. And here's the opportunity. If the high schools only realized, if they had some decent news, how easy it would be to get in the paper in this particular context, and yet we are really fighting an uphill battle to try to get them to be responsive. Now we are starting to get some sort of results.

There is another thing I meant to mention when I was talking about crisis reporting. This is not crisis reporting but the news of strikes, bond issues, tax levies, land acquisitions, budgets. So much of what goes into the paper as so-called education coverage really has nothing to do with the content of education. I think you are well aware of that. Again it is related to the news of what is happening right then and there, news the paper believes it must cover. This is another problem that I wanted to interject for your consideration when we get into the questions.

But to get back to the over-all education coverage. Where do we get the ideas for stories? They originate in the minds of reporters, in the minds of editors, they come from news releases, and from suggestions from people who call. A hot idea takes precedence over several tepid ideas and the hot idea will be written while the others are put aside. Some of the most important stories are the ones that deal with trends. These are stories we are constantly on the lookout for at our newspaper. We want stories that are telling what's going to be happening in education, stories that get into the thinking of people. At the *Times*, especially since we are a national paper, we value the trend stories.

A question that might come up now is, who should be writing education stories? Very few of the people who write education news for daily newspapers in this country are professional educators, as you may already know. I do not think that they have to be professional educators, which does not mean they shouldn't be informed and keep abreast of the field. I was speaking with CBE's associate director, George Weber, a little earlier and he brought up something very interesting. He points out that there is a great deal of turnover among education writers and that there apparently are many people writing about education on newspapers who would prefer not to be writing about education. The turnover, the fact that there are people who are writing about education who would prefer not to be, I think is a reflection of something else George Weber and I were talking about: that often a newspaper or publication may expect at least a minimum level of expertise from people who are assigned to cover certain beats. For instance, I think that someone who is assigned the job of music criticism or someone who is writing about science often has some sort of minimum competence or understanding in these fields, and perhaps a commitment to the field as well, which has something to do with his having acquired this background. In education coverage, frankly, many newspapers do regard the education beat as some place to move up to from the police beat and something on the way to getting the politics beat. I do not think that this is necessarily bad because if the person who is doing the job is committed, is willing to acquire the knowledge, and has something to bring to the situation he can still do a decent job. It is not the same thing, of course, as a person who has a career commitment to education writing and has become steeped in the field.

I have alluded to the qualities that are important; whether the person is an education writer for life or for just a short period of time, he has to be insightful, probing, has to ask the right questions, know how to observe, and have a background that enables him to evaluate this particular news event or the thing that is being written about. This does not mean, on the other hand, that a professional educator cannot be an education writer. Of course such an educator can. But, from what I have seen of the way the professional educators write, I think that they would have to divest themselves of this academese, the jargon, the educational gobbledygook. Some of the most godawful writing I have seen has come from educators who have the feeling that the more they can obfuscate, the more scholarly it is, and this just is ineffective in writing for newspapers. Also it is

important to keep in mind that the vast majority of the people who are reading education stories in newspapers are laymen who have absolutely no knowledge of it except they know how their youngster is doing in second grade or how much they are paying to send their daughter to Vassar. Education writing just cannot be in this very technical, heavy jargon because that does not communicate. Lots of times this kind of writing fails even when educators are trying to communicate with each other.

If an education writer really wants to be serious about his work, he has to keep up with the journals in the field. This puts an added responsibility on an education writer that a person in some other field on a daily newspaper does not have. On many, many of the beats and general assignments on a daily paper, when the person finishes up for that day, that's it. He goes home, nothing hanging over his head. Now to do a conscientious and reasonable job as an education writer I think it is very important to keep up with journals, to keep up with what is being written professionally in the field. Education writers, I do want to emphasize, are very seldom experts on methodology or the esoteric areas of the field. But they can be quite informed and can have a very sufficient background for discussing the subjects.

As far as improving reporting about schools is concerned, what have you done lately, those of you who are in the schools yourself? Is there somebody from your school system, is there somebody in each high school who is assigned the responsibility of public relations? Are you trying to inform the news media when you think you have something that is newsworthy? Are you working closely with the local weekly or daily to keep them abreast of what is going on? When was the last time that you got some editors or writers, whether they cover education as specialties or not, to come into your buildings, to talk to students and to circulate freely, without having a superintendent or principal hanging over the person's shoulder to try to intimidate the little kids as to what they are going to say to the education writer?

One of the questions that Mortimer Smith asked that I discuss with you this afternoon was this: What can school boards and administrators do to ease the flow of honest reporting about the schools? Much of what I have said already bears on this. Honest reporting is enhanced by honest news sources, by people who realize that they are better off not trying to hide facts, by allowing reporters to search out the news, and by news sources that are willing to admit their mistakes and their foibles. I recently had occasion to contact one of

our universities in New York City in connection with a story I was doing about a very serious parking problem on that campus. Some of the students were quite exercised by it, and the university administration was apparently doing some reprehensible things. I told the public relations person at this university whom I was trying to get in touch with—a student this person could have helped me find—and he hemmed and hawed and beat around the bush and led me to believe, although he did not say it, that he was not going to help me. Well, I am still waiting for his call, and have been for about four weeks now. I contacted the student on my own through some other students whom I knew. But I just cannot respect that institution and will certainly keep that in mind in any future contacts with its public relations office.

I would agree that some of the problems that have to be covered are really tough on the school, and it is difficult to just open up and say "come right in and see what's going on" because admittedly a lot of the problems that schools have are problems that society has, and are just reflections of those problems, and the schools are not necessarily to blame, and the schools feel very sensitive about some of these things. But as I say, it is not the job of the news media to function as public relations people for the schools. This is an area, I think, of major misunderstanding in thinking of the education writer's job. It goes back to the old saw of "why don't you write something good about us?" This is not to say that reporters have to concentrate on a diet of adverse news about schools. It would seem that almost every school, every school system, has something that could be written that is favorable, and education writers should look for things like this as well as for the bad news. Education and the reader will be best served, though, if the article attempts to place the subject of the article in an over-all perspective and try to be honest about it. For instance, a piece about what seems to be a strong reading program at one school must be written in terms of what is being done in reading programs generally and how all this bears on the teaching of reading, not just that one program.

In summary, the education writer is an impartial observer whose job it is to report for an audience comprised predominantly of laymen. In the vast majority of cases, he is a layman himself. He is interested in education and informed on the subject in many instances, and should have credit for that, but his knowledge is less than that of the professional expert. His role is an impartial one: to write the news, good or bad, but simply the news.

Jacques Barzun

Thank you, Mr. Maeroff. I think your statement is very persuasive as to the primacy of news. It would be completely persuasive if the newspapers stuck to news as they once did. But they have become reviews and magazines as well, and they do print soft news—those picturesque accounts of how the music pupils at a certain school are making their own instruments out of old corn-flake boxes in order to learn the principles of acoustics at first hand. And I should say, speaking for myself, that even the often excellent articles on "trends" are not news and do not belong in newspapers. I should like to go back to newspapers, but that is utopian, I know.

Now we are to hear from someone who, as the former head of school systems, must have views not only pertinent but powerful. Forbes Bottomly was superintendent of schools at Seattle and formerly in Colorado after being a teacher in Montana. He has his doctorate from Washington State University and at the present time is executive director of the Metropolitan Planning Project in Boston. Dr. Bottomly.

Forbes Bottomly

It's a great pleasure to be here. I was happy to hear Mr. Maeroff say that in New York City the more administrators they had the more possibilities there were for things to go wrong. That must have improved the newsworthiness of the situation considerably.

My first antagonism with the press goes back to northern Montana, where I was a school administrator on the Blackfeet Indian Reservation. I had made a speech to a graduating class and it was reported in the *Chieftain*, which was the Blackfeet newspaper. Eddie Old Man Chief was the editor and the sole employee. He did his own typesetting and did all of his own writing and published this thing once a week, although sometimes he didn't quite make it. He wasn't as concerned about deadlines as some of the major papers of the country. And he indicated in his story that my new name should be Kuka Pingway, and that was about all he said about the talk. I asked some of my Blackfeet friends what that meant, and they wouldn't tell me, being loyal members of the tribe. Years later I did find someone who would tell me. As a matter of fact it wasn't until I had gotten out to Seattle, Washington, and met one of my old students, and he said, "That means 'talk lot, do little'."

As a school administrator I have always had to put public relations high on the priorities list. That is the only way we can get our levies

passed. In Seattle we had to get 60 per cent majority. When you deal with newspapers and the concerns of the news writers, you have to consider these things. A regular majority is not so bad, but when you have to get 60 per cent majority you have to have more than ordinary even breaks in order to get things done. And the reporters, the TV commentators and others who are dealing in news should understand that every time they write or speak they are part of social policy, and may not be weighing things in an equal way. They actually should be weighing the situation in terms of what it is in the actual voting set-up of any particular district. We have to get our levies and bond issues passed, and we have to get our constituency aboard if we are going to put on the pressure necessary in the democratic process to get the state legislatures to provide a foundation program for basic education.

So a good deal of my time and other superintendents' time is spent on trying to develop and maintain a favorable public image, for the system and for himself. The superintendent is in a fishbowl. He wants to look good, he wants to look strong, he wants to look innovative and conservative at the same time. He wants to look infallible, and he wants to look compassionate and objective, and so forth. On the other hand, the educational reporter wants to report stories which have appeal and will sell papers, impress the publisher and enhance his reputation. I think a *good* reporter considers himself an image destroyer. I say this from the point of view of a superintendent of schools. The reporter is constantly attempting to drag the public official down to at least a common denominator of the general population to make sure that everyone understands his mistakes and his foibles and to make him look very human, that is, very common, and so we have a natural antagonism. It is natural for each of us to play games, the reporter to play games with the superintendent and the superintendent, especially, to play games with the reporter. The important thing in the relationship, I think, is for each to understand and respect the other's role. It becomes destructive and anxiety-ridden when the game degenerates into hostility and suspicion. The superintendent soon learns that he can't win in playing this game. Those who write or comment have an almost unassailable position of advantage in such a game. The smart superintendent will not attempt to retaliate against a reporter for what he gathers is an unfair story; he probably won't even criticize. He knows that the reporter has a means of dealing out punishment for days on end and is even capable of hounding a superintendent out of a job and out of town. A reporter

can actually destroy a person's career, as anyone in the school game or in public life knows. There are no restraints except ethical restraints or some internal discipline applied in the print media. There is no way that a superintendent can punish back without being concerned about retaliation by a newspaper or especially an individual reporter.

Back in 1907 Justice Holmes wrote an opinion that the purpose of the guarantee of the freedom of the press was only to prevent all restraints *previous* to publication, but not to prevent *subsequent* punishment. But what superintendent—I don't know of any—is willing to try to invoke such punishment when the cards are stacked as they are at the present time? I have had a city editor call me up and invoke his wrath and use invective to get me to make sure that his reporter has a story now and then at a time when the other major daily was getting all of the stories. And the reason the other major daily was getting the stories was because they had an excellent reporter who dug them out. He was a genuine ferret. And the reporter of this particular daily was rather lackadaisical, a fine young man but just unable to get the stories. And the city editor threatened me with future retaliation if I did not see to it that his reporter got some of the goodies. I have had TV commentators say, "Well you had better say something because, if you don't, I'm going to go on television with my story with what other people have said, and if you don't tell your version of this thing it will be a one-sided story." And I knew what he meant. So I would be forced into either responding or saying, "Go ahead and do what you want to do." And I have done that on occasion, but always, believe me, always, it came out in a way that made me think that I should have made a quote or said something that might have eased the situation.

So I believe the ideal situation is a detente between the media and the public official, especially the superintendent of schools. And I have found that to maintain a reasonable detente there are a few things that both the superintendent of schools and the reporter might consider. I think the superintendent should treat all reporters alike, and all papers alike, and not give any preference, even though some of the reporters are friendly, or at least moderate and perhaps better in their approach to educational news. But to show favoritism is, in my experience, a dangerous thing. It will come back to haunt. Friends expect favors and enemies will continue to punish you.

Hold periodic off-the-record briefings for the reporters on background information. Many of the reporters do not want to attend

because they want to do their own investigation, but I think it is a good way to put things into a perspective with the writers.

I think a superintendent of schools should not worry about leaks from his administration. I should not say not worry about them, but he should not try to squash them or to track them down or to find out who is leaking the news. It can be extremely irritating to a superintendent of schools, but to act like Captain Queeg and who-stole-the-strawberries, or like a well-known president with his bugging devices, I think is something that is not becoming to a superintendent of schools. And as a matter of fact you probably never will find out whose wife told some friend about something that was going to happen that got out to a reporter who followed up on the lead.

Shrug off press barbs, Mr. Superintendent, and disagreeable stories. It is part of the game. A new trend in editorial comment is to be cynical, sarcastic, biting, and to develop a bitter humor. Adjectives such as "bumbling," "stupid," "ashen-faced," "craven," and a host of others will appear describing a superintendent's activities. Do not be bothered; it is an expiation which must be enjoyed as part of American mores. And pretty soon the American public kind of finds out about that, and there is an evening effect. The underdog syndrome comes to the rescue on occasion.

If there is a serious misinterpretation or an outright error which is damaging, try to have a citizen or businessman or other responsible person answer it in a letter to the editor. It often may be corrected by a story in the evening paper by another reporter. It may be a good idea to go on television or go to the television reporters to get the correction made quickly. Watch for the wire stories. Often these are written by people who have little background in reporting at all, and certainly no background in education. These people will put some things on the wire before they have all the facts, and the superintendent should have some way of getting quickly to the major papers and to the television and radio reporters to ease the situation before it becomes too damaging. A superintendent should have, a school district should have, a supplementary communication system with parents and perhaps with the general public ready to repair major damage when it occurs. In Seattle there was a private group that had a little paper that they published to bring about a straightforward, non-establishment type of reporting on educational matters.

Answer all of the inquiries from the press, and radio and TV. Give no comment if necessary, but try to give some information, or at least

a quote. Hold off, though, until you have had the facts gathered and do not shoot from the hip. Carefully weigh what you say on television or radio tapes. The commentators will piece it to fit their story, and you should be aware of their efforts to start or continue a rhubarb in the community. Avoid being set up, if you can, for a conflict with, say, a major black leader — a white leader in the community or a mayor or a PTA president or a teachers' union president.

When there is a crisis such as a student confrontation or racial incident, provide an immediate way for the press to be involved. It may be not advisable to permit reporters or TV cameras into a tense situation, but there should be a room provided with someone providing a constant reporting on the situation, and in this case the person doing the reporting should give an honest picture of the problem but also a strong statement on what is going to be done to resolve it. Try to give the whole story as soon as possible to counteract the bit-by-bit kind of drama.

You should carry on, too, frequent inservice training programs with other administrators, especially principals, because they are going to be on the front line of some of the hot crisis stories. At a high school in Seattle the principal, a number of years ago, was held in his office by a group of black students who had stormed his office to gain some satisfaction from him. It was a tense situation with the whole school in an uproar and police for blocks around waiting to be called in. When the reporters were kept out—the TV cameras were kept out of the situation and the principal was in the office for an hour or two—when he came out they wanted to grab him and get the story. The hot story was that the principal was held in his office and to him that was the only story, but the real story was much deeper and much more profound. It had to do with the relationship between faculty, principal and students, and it had to do with the equity of the black-white relationship in that particular school. The situation was, however, that the main story for days afterward, and the subject of editorial comment, was the fact that a principal was held in his building, and the principal could think of nothing for days but the fact that he was held in his office by a group of black students. It was a challenge to his authority that was beyond his scope of understanding at that particular time in history.

Be wary of giving asides or joking comments on matters. These often will appear in headlines or in some unbecoming manner. Avoid appearing defensive. Don't dwell on how hard the superintendent's

job is or that people don't understand. If it is necessary to chastise the media or to ask them to tone down criticisms or to reduce their emphasis on violence because it is interfering with the educational process, do it by calling upon community leaders, including the managing or executive editors, but don't zero in on a particular instance in public or try to blame a single reporter. Keep the educational editors and TV and radio commentators informed of the positive things going on in the schools. Have principals and teachers identify the success stories and be prepared to tell them or demonstrate them to the news media. Write letters of appreciation once in a while to the education editor and/or to the managing editors when stories appear which are well done, factual and represent the situation faithfully.

Schools are in a crisis situation most of the time these days. They have been for at least ten years. Much of education has been confrontation education, and I have found that there is nothing wrong with faithfully reporting the confrontations as long as they are in context, and put in the context of the social scene of the day. But I would like to suggest to educational reporters and editors several things.

There is a tremendous need for a strong sense of ethics. At a time of intense feelings I think there is a need for a stronger sense of ethics in the newspaper, radio and television business. I suggest to the educational reporter that he report the educational happenings factually and in a straightforward manner. There is nothing to me more elegant than a simple, straightforward story about school business, or any other business. Don't make a story suit your idea of what will have appeal to the public by twisting and turning and recontextualizing (I have to make up a word, I guess), by emphasizing the minor aspects and playing down the major. Avoid editorializing in news stories. Television, especially, is a culprit, because TV people make shorts, they produce something that has impact. They will clip and cut and put things together to appeal to the public and improve their ratings, and sometimes what appears has little relationship to the actual happenings, as many black youngsters, white youngsters, and school people know.

Get the facts; avoid errors. Too much is at stake for sloppy reporting. Education news is a very important source of information for many pupils these days, and for many other people. At Rainier Beach High School in Seattle we had a black student and a white student fighting

in the school yard, with a big crowd of students around. The police were called and the radio commentators who were monitoring the police reports picked up the story that there was a mob of white students beating up two black students. The reporter reported this in his jingo style over the radio station and students all over the city listening to their little receivers as they walked around heard it. Black students at one of the high schools said, we have to go protect our brothers and sisters. They jumped in their cars, and before the day was over there was a genuine disturbance, a real riot, that could have been avoided by a better sense of ethics on the part of the radio announcer.

Have a sense of community balance. Don't contribute to over-reaction on the part of the public and on the part of public officials. Avoid making a bigger deal out of a white person being abused by a black person than a black person being abused by a white. The best approach is to treat all abuses alike. Because abuse makes news, treat them all alike. Save the analysis and the adjectives and the phrases which are inflammatory or give impressions which may not be warranted by facts for the editorials; don't use such words as "battle zones." Avoid making hard news out of soft news is what I am trying to say.

Try to be editorially consistent and check back with past editorials. If you want to do profiles on the school board members or the superintendents, please have someone other than the educational editor do these. Avoid top-of-the-head editorializing. Many modern TV shows have teams that sit around a table in the news context—I think you have all seen these. They sit around the camera and talk about the news as they go along in light banter. If you will let me use one of the common expressions of the day, they will sit around and bullshit about important happenings of the day. It is half news, half superficial banter. It is often in error, often damaging, often malicious, often defamatory or slanderous and infrequently amusing. I would say to the TV reporters, separate your entertainment, or attempts at entertainment, from the hard news or the soft news. Editorials should be developed out of research and study and should attempt to place news happenings in context of larger forces and a historical perspective.

Despite my complaints, it seems to me that reporting on the part of editorial writers and on the part of education writers in the last few years has improved. They are more professional; that is, they

have a knack of investigating and reporting which is more objective and more understanding of the place of education in society than the reporters of ten years ago. On the other hand, in the neighborhood weekly papers I have seen a deterioration of reporting. The smaller staffs and overworked editors find they cannot be too friendly to the school bureaucracy. The growth of integration which is a threat to the neighborhood school has led neighborhood editors to be fearful of saying anything helpful about the schools if there is an attempt to bring about integration. It is not possible for these editors to buck the hostility of local citizens.

I do not think that the educational reporter should have training in education. He should have training in political science, history, anthropology and philosophy, but not in education. Education is not that complex for the reporter. What is needed is someone who can quickly translate educational happenings into news stories which are honest, readable and understandable to the general public. A writer who has a sense of history, a broad view of the dynamics of society, is able to put these pieces together in the jigsaw puzzle of human affairs and to contribute to the greater view of education as a hopeful instrument of the future.

Jacques Barzun

Thank you. I was not mistaken. Dr. Bottomly has given us both a treatise on the art of war and a code of ethics for avoiding it, as well as shown us how to bind up the wounds if there is war.

We have had, as you have noticed, one man from journalism and one from the schools. Our next speaker, Dr. Paul Woodring, has the happy, or unhappy, position of being both. He was for many years, as you all know, editor of the *Saturday Review* supplement on education. He is now a distinguished service professor at Western Washington State College. He has been advisor to the Ford Foundation on education, and has written a book that I think you all know, *A Fourth of a Nation*. Dr. Woodring.

Paul Woodring

I shall comment from the background of my experience as an editor of a national magazine. The previous speakers have spoken mostly about the problems of writing about local news—local in the sense that New York and Seattle are, though of course large localities, still essentially local. I would like to point out that the problems of

writing for a national magazine, read by people in all the fifty states and some in Canada, are somewhat different. By way of further identification of myself, I might say that I have been a teacher, off and on, for forty years. I started teaching in a school in Rocky Ridge, Ohio, at the age of nineteen. I have been a writer for about twenty years, only half as long, and I was education editor at *Saturday Review* for less than ten years, so I think of myself first as a teacher, second as a writer, and third as an editor, but I must say in my ten years at *Saturday Review* I learned a great deal about the business of being an editor. I started out from scratch with almost no knowledge of editing.

One thing I learned was that the editor or the writer who chooses education as his field faces all the hazards known to other journalists—and a few more besides. If he was educated in this country, he is a product of some of our schools and knows them from the student's point of view. But he is not likely to have more than a passing acquaintance with other kinds of schools. And this is important because the American educational establishment is a confusing array of public, private, and parochial schools; elementary, secondary and higher, enrolling more than fifty million Americans—a fourth of a nation. Strictly speaking, there is so such thing as "The American Education System." No one is really in charge; no one has any authority over all our separate institutions. And this, apparently, is the way we want it. It is a part of what Frederick Lewis Allen once called "The Unsystematic American System."

Yet, as writers and editors for a national audience, we must at least try to comprehend the totality of our educational structure, and to understand how the parts relate to each other. We must try not to let our vision be distorted by our own experience in the schools that we attended.

Provincialism—actually localism would be a better term for it since it doesn't mean provincialism in the traditional sense—takes many forms. So far as magazine editors are concerned, the most common is that of the urban-oriented, Eastern Seaboard editors operating out of New York who have never climbed the Alleghenies to look over the top toward the sunset. They find it hard to believe that a large number of their readers live in that part of the country that lies to the west of the Delaware Water Gap. Because of their urban orientation, they are prone to give most of their attention to the problems of urban education and to define "urban" as big-city—as a

city of at least a million people. They have accepted all too easily the cliché that ours is an urban nation.

And this is a dangerous half-truth—dangerous because it leads to neglect of the schools which most of our boys and girls attend. In fact, the population trend toward the big cities ended more than a generation ago. Most of the big cities of the East (Washington, D. C., is an exception) have not grown since 1940 and several have declined substantially. Today, even such Western cities as Seattle, San Francisco, and Los Angeles are losing people. They have lost people in the last ten years. In Los Angeles most of the loss has come in the last two or three years. Today only 10 per cent of the American people live in cities of over one million. The percentage living in cities of that size was larger forty years ago than it is now.

In contrast, 30 per cent of the people—nearly sixty million Americans—still live in areas classed by the Census Bureau as "rural," meaning farms plus villages of no more than 2,500. To the Census Bureau, urban means anything from 2,501 up. This is not what the ordinary reader or writer means by urban, but it is what writers mean when they say we are becoming an urban nation. It means we are moving into towns of over 2,500. The schools attended by the 60,000,000 people who live in areas classed as rural have some problems too, and their problems are being ignored by writers and editors.

About 40 per cent of our people live in towns of from 2,500 to 100,000. The remaining 20 per cent live in cities ranging in size from 100,000 to one million. To be sure some—but not nearly all—of these medium-sized towns and cities are suburbs of larger cities. But the trend of recent years has not been toward urbanization but toward *sub*urbanization, and those two words should never be confused because they refer to very different life-styles. And very different educational problems.

When I was education editor of *Saturday Review* I tried not to forget that some of our leaders lived in Albuquerque, Peoria, Portland, Rocky Ridge, Ohio, and we even had one in Spotted Horse, Wyoming. But I found it hard to convince our writers of this fact. Most of them wanted to write about the big cities and nothing else.

The problem of bussing has a different meaning in scattered rural areas, where it means long hours on a school bus, sometimes as many as four hours a day for some rural children, from what it does in a more

concentrated area where bussing means only twenty minutes or half an hour. Racial segregation in the North, where it results from de facto segregation in housing, is different from that in the South where it has other causes. The question of religious holidays and religious observances in the schools looks very different in a city made up of Catholics, Protestants, Jews, agnostics, and atheists—with perhaps a few Mohammedans thrown in—than it does in a village where almost everyone goes to the same church. Because legislators sometimes overlook these differences, education writers should call attention to them when laws are being considered that will apply to an entire state.

A second hazard facing educational writers—and this applies particularly to those who write for newspapers—is that of giving too much attention to trivia. Previous speakers have already commented to some extent about that. I suppose one reason is that trivia such as drum majorettes, beauty contests, fraternity initiations, and sloshing through the mud on the gridiron lend themselves better to pictorial treatment than does intellectual activity which takes place between the ears and cannot be photographed. But a recent survey of a sample of newspapers revealed that of all the space given to educational institutions, 48 per cent was given to athletics and the accompanying side-shows, 18 per cent to social activities, and only 34 per cent to anything that could properly be called education. And even part of that 34 per cent was given to confrontations of various kinds, which were not very educational, except maybe to the people involved.

A third hazard is that of giving too much attention, credit, or blame to the top administrator. This results from the fact that the school superintendent or the college president is highly visible while teachers are not. But often the result is undeserved credit or undeserved blame.

A national news magazine, eulogizing a retiring president of a state university, gave him credit for "building up" the enrollment from 4,000 to 12,000 in 20 years. The fact was that the population of that state had grown rapidly and a state law required the university to admit all high school graduates who applied. The president did not "build up" the enrollment—he just happened to be in the front office when it happened. He could not have prevented it had he tried. He might have been a better president if he had tried to establish some entrance standards and reduce the enrollment.

Another news story said a school superintendent had "hiked" teacher salaries 85 per cent during his term of office (the choice of verb was theirs—not mine). The fact was that during this superin-

tendent's term of office salaries all across the nation had risen 110 per cent. The superintendent had allowed salaries in his schools to fall behind. A better reporter would have placed the figures in perspective.

Top administrators sometimes are blamed for things not their fault. One superintendent was sharply criticized in the press because the scores of pupils on a nationally standardized test had fallen sharply within a decade. The fact was that during that decade thousands of middle-class families had moved out of that city and had been replaced by people of lower socio-economic background. And the test used was one that reflects socio-economic background about as much as it reflects schooling. The superintendent had nothing to do with it.

I might add at this point that some reporters have so little understanding of statistics that they are alarmed to discover that 40, 50 or 60 per cent of the children in a school are "below the national norm" in reading, spelling, or some other subject. "Norm," as the word is used in most educational literature, merely means average. When it is used this way, 50 per cent will always be below the norm just as 50 per cent are below the norm in height, weight, or anything else that can be measured. Even if the norm rises sharply, 50 per cent are still going to be below it.

Another fallacy results from relying too much on official sources for statistics. Reporters, like the rest of us, are often lazy, and it is easier to take an official handout than to investigate. Throughout the fifties and sixties reporters glibly quoted figures from the U.S. Office of Education and the NEA indicating that there was a nationwide shortage of 150,000 teachers, or sometimes 200,000 teachers. Once in a while they got it as high as 250,000 teachers. When readers read this they thought, my, there are all these eager little faces facing the front of the room, and no teacher there. That, in fact, wasn't true at all. In fact, very few classrooms were ever without teachers. The figures were arrived at by subtracting the number of fully certified teachers available from the number that would be required to take care of growing enrollments, replace those leaving the profession, *and* reduce class size and provide additional special services which the professional groups considered desirable. Actually, most of the slack was taken up by teachers not yet fully certified (but many of whom were excellent teachers) who were working toward full certification and eventually got it, so they were no longer counted as part of the teacher shortage. But during that period a teacher might, for example, have an MAT degree from Harvard and go to California to get a job

as a teacher and be not fully certified because he didn't have a course in California school law, but he would then be counted as a part of the teacher shortage because he wasn't fully certified.

The publicity given to these misleading figures was partly responsible for the great oversupply of teachers today. We continued to prepare teachers for non-existent jobs and to encourage young people to prepare for teaching when many should have been advised to make other plans.

Another hazard is that of giving undue publicity to a "new development" in education that is not really new at all. Because of this danger, every education writer must have a broad knowledge of the history of education. I don't care how he got it, whether in courses or by reading, but he must know a great deal about the history of education. If he doesn't, he shouldn't be reporting the news. Every year or so some bright young educator comes up with the remarkable discovery that the important thing in education is not learning facts but rather learning how to think. He needs to be reminded that Socrates made a similar discovery quite a while ago.

Recently a number of elementary schools have gotten a lot of mileage out of the Montessori method, which newspapers and magazines have described as "an exciting new approach to childhood education." An education writer should know that the Montessori method is not new at all. It has been around a long time. It was brought to America in 1910 and was taught in normal schools and used in some schools during the nineteen-twenties. A sophisticated reporter would have asked, "Why all the excitement about an old method?" Piaget has recently been discovered, too, and his ideas are considered new, though Piaget was a famous psychologist when I was a student, and that's quite a while ago.

The problem of jargon is always troublesome to an education editor. By jargon I do *not* mean technical terminology which is used for precision. By jargon I mean obscure and pretentious language, marked by circumlocutions, or language that conceals meaning. The literature of education is replete with jargon. Once we had "practice teaching"; then this was changed to "student teaching" (to conceal the fact that teachers were practicing on children). Then it became "professional laboratory experience" to make it sound more scientific and elegant, though it didn't take place in a laboratory at all.

Some jargon may be necessary to avoid being offensive. We call a child a "slow learner" to avoid having to say to his parent that he

is stupid. But it is misleading to call him an "underachiever" if he is doing all he can and that is not very much. Most "late bloomers" are children whose abilities were unrecognized for a time or whose motivation has improved. I can find no evidence that a child's basic intellectual capacity ever shoots up suddenly. The word "dropout" is badly overused and misused. As used today it seems to imply that everyone, regardless of vocational plan, intellectual capacity, special interest or motivation, ought to graduate from high school and that any boy or girl who does not must face unemployment and a life of crime. There is no justification for any such assumption—no evidence that the unmotivated, disinterested, and antagonistic pupil who is urged or required to remain in school will be any better off for it.

However, some terms that border on jargon cannot easily be avoided. I can find no good substitute for such terms as "disadvantaged," "culturally deprived," or "underprivileged." "Poor" is not a synonym because a family with a very low income—I am thinking of some of the ministers' families I have known—may give its children the benefit of intelligent conversation, good books, and good music. Such children are not deprived, they are not seriously disadvantaged.

But technical terminology is not jargon. "Conditioning" and "reinforcement" are useful technical terms with precise meaning. Probably they are not known to the general public, so that if you use them in a newspaper you will have to offer some explanation. But they are not jargon. "I.Q.," when properly used, is a technical term referring to the ratio between mental age and chronological age on a given, usually an individually administered, test, most often the Stanford-Binet. But it becomes jargon when it is used as a synonym for intelligence. Many tests of intelligence—those that report scores as percentiles or standard scores—are not I.Q. tests and should not be called I.Q. tests.

Any writer who tries to tell his story in vigorous, journalistic prose faces a special hazard when he tries to deal fairly with complicated educational issues. If he makes his prose more vigorous by using strong verbs and a minimum of adjectives and adverbs, he is likely to sacrifice truth to style. A writer can attract attention by saying bluntly, "Teachers colleges teach nothing but methods," "Today's children are not taught to read and write," or "The people who educate our teachers are incompetent." His prose will be less sharp and effective if he adds the adjective "some" or "many," but without such adjectives such statements are just not true.

No doubt you have all read *The Elements of Style* (if you haven't read it, I recommend it to all reporters and writers) in which William Strunk, Jr., advises writers, "Use the active voice. Make definite assertions. Avoid tame, colorless, hesitating, non-committal language. Omit needless words." This is sound advice provided one caution is added. Be sure the qualifying words you omit really *are* needless.

While an education reporter must report the news, an education editor has additional responsibilities. He must establish policy. Because he always has more articles and news stories than space permits him to publish, he must select. And when he writes editorials he should take a stand. On some issues he may choose to remain neutral, but if he remains neutral on everything he remains a reporter rather than an editor. There can be no doubt that some kinds of education are better than others and more likely to contribute to the proper aims of education; that the editor should have some views of what the proper aims of education are. There is no doubt that some educational procedures and some types of school organization are better than others, and that some educational philosophies and trends are potentially dangerous. If a writer cannot make value judgments on any of these issues he is not yet ready for editorial responsibilities. His judgments may legitimately influence the tone of his editorials and to some extent his selection of stories and articles. But his value judgments should not affect the factual reporting of news.

On editorial pages and in journals of opinion, it is legitimate to publish vigorous criticism. A critic of education is no more an "enemy of the schools" than a music critic is an enemy of music. But an editor must be able to distinguish between informed criticism and the blind attack of paranoids. And the schools have had their fair share of that kind of criticism.

The education writer who makes a lifetime career of education writing, and who has made a careful investigation of his subject, is in the best position to provide the informed, continuing, critical examination that is needed because he is free of institutional commitments and able to survey the entire system from top to bottom. Meanwhile, he can illuminate the dark corners, provide the necessary perspective, call attention to problems, and keep the people informed.

Jacques Barzun

Thank you, Dr. Woodring. Some of us a while ago found out that one had better learn a subject in order to be able to teach it, and

now Dr. Woodring tells us that we have to know it in order to write about it. It's very discouraging.

Our last speaker, who has a roving commission for today to cover any points made or unmade, is Mrs. Barbara Reimers, who is a graduate of Vassar and now president of the National School Boards Association. She holds a law degree, has served as arbitrator for school boards in Connecticut, has held positions with the Education Committee of the Connecticut General Assembly, and is several times a president because for the last six years she has headed the Branford, Connecticut, board of education and has been president of the Connecticut Association of Boards of Education.

Barbara Reimers

Mortimer Smith assigned me the clean-up spot and hoped that I could stir up some controversy. The difficulty with being in the clean-up spot is that everything you want to say has been said. However, as a school board member and a public official, I would like to say that education *is* the politics beat. And this is the point of view from which I look at the assignment this afternoon of schools and the press. One of the other jobs I do is to serve with the Connecticut legislature as a staff person for the education committee, and not only as a local school board member do I see the power of the press but also in the state legislature, where, I think, sometimes you people do not know how powerful you are.

I wish to stress the point that I am not an educator; I am a public official. But we tend to speak the language of educators after we have been in the school board chair long enough, and therefore we are seldom understood because not very many reporters or many members of the public speak what is known as "educanto." And if we do not learn to speak in plain English in the field of education, we are going to be extinct, as a former U.S. Commissioner called us, like the dodo. And ever since education has become very big business, employing seven per cent of the nation's work force, and variously quoted as spending from 45 billion to 65 billion dollars a year—a business which deals with our most cherished possessions: our children, our heritage, our intellectual freedom, our future, both personal and national—there has been a scramble to get control of our system. Despite a previous speaker's denial of the fact that we have an educational system, we do, but that is a subject for another discussion.

There are city, town, and county fiscal bodies, state legislatures, governors, Congress, the Chief Executive of the United States, the

assorted hierarchies of professional educators and their associations, the state boards and departments of education, the United States Office of Education, the military, industry—you can name many more, all of whom have an interest in controlling the educational system of the United States. The press and other communications media have a key role in the struggle for power. By the media's ability to choose how and to what it will give visibility it wields great influence. You can make a clown appear to be a hero, and often can make a sincere and intelligent human being look a fool. You can obscure issues or enlighten the public by your methods of dealing or not dealing with educational news. Right now the schools of this country are so quiet it is eerie. I do not know whether this quiet is an illusion due to your preoccupation with more glamorous news, such as Watergate, the Agnew affair and the Middle East war, or whether our former notoriety was the illusion.

I tend to feel that the schools go on from day to day in much the same way as they always have. Whether that is a strength or a weakness is a matter of your point of view. As a school board member from the Northeast, where I am exposed daily to the finest newspapers and magazines in the world, I see two very different kinds of educational press. My colleagues on this panel represent the thoughtful, in-depth, analytical and usually liberal approach to educational issues. But elsewhere we find a sprouting of education writers and editors whose chief concern is to report the kind of news that is history on the run. The articles which appear seem to assume that everyone knows what happened yesterday. Typically, the papers of a core city are understaffed and have to serve a great many suburban districts, and probably cannot do much more than they do. However, one aspect of daily reporting could be improved, and that is headline writing. Often the headline bears no relation to the article and is frequently misleading. It very often even has an editorial slant. For example, as a local school board member one of the problems I found intriguing was the day that in a board meeting we had a report which stated that in a local school building—an old building—we had replaced the windows on the ground floor facing the playground with Plexiglas because when the youngsters played there the ball frequently hit the windows and broke the glass. The next day's headline said: "School board members dare kids to break windows." Now that is certainly an editorial comment and it certainly does not reflect anywhere near the truth of the article.

More recently, in the Connecticut legislature we have had a finance study dealing with the problem of equality of educational opportunity and a better system of financing schools than we presently have. A very enterprising reporter from one of the Hartford papers somehow dug out some of the discussion that was going on and wrote an article which was *almost* true. What happened was that this was a group of people who were exploring ideas, ideas which were not firm, who were seeking information by trying out some of their ideas on their fellow members of the commission. And this is dangerous if there is a reporter around, because, as was mentioned earlier, if you say something that is an aside or tentative or even a funny remark, it usually makes a headline. So, the next day, the paper said, "State Board Cops Out on School Finance." Now this was unfair, it was editorial comment, but it had an interesting final result. This series of articles ran three days, and there also was an attack on the governor involved. And this is politics, too, although it is done by an education writer. It actually forced the governor to come around to the side we wanted him on in the first place, which was very interesting. But it is an example of the power the press has, and it is a power that should be used responsibly. In this particular case it had a happy outcome, but that is not always true.

Most school districts are lacking staff people who are skilled in press relations, and one of the reasons for this often is that the educational writers of the local newspaper create, or help to create, an environment in which a public relations member on your school staff would be considered a frill. So this is a vicious kind of a circle, where the kind of person we need to help the situation is blocked by the situation itself.

The whole question of press bias is too complicated, of course, for such a short treatment as we can give it this afternoon. But one other problem that worries me, and I believe that Paul Woodring touched on it briefly, is the bandwagon type of reporting where paper after paper, magazine after magazine, will harp on the same idea. I read recently in a book by Thomas Mann, *Joseph the Provider*, a statement which practically leaped off the page at me because I was thinking about this talk this afternoon: "the widespread though mistaken, belief that when two people hit on the same idea it must be a good one." And one example of this, I think, has been the Career Education idea, which is the latest example of education's search for the magic answer. It has had a favorable press, and again I think this is because

press writers naturally love words, and you get a phrase like "career education"—it's lovely to say, it's easy to write, nobody really knows what it means, and so you can't possibly be faulted for writing an article about something which is so popular. However, as Dr. Woodring said, it is giving a great deal of visibility to a not-new idea. And therefore it is wise—I second that—to know something of education history.

It is not surprising, given the reluctance of the education community to come to grips with reality and plain English, and the inexperience of many reporters, that there is often friction, disenchantment, frustration and anger on both sides of the communications gap. We really can't blame anyone but ourselves when the news, as reported, seems distorted to us. After all, we taught the reporters to write.

Boards of education also have many unfulfilled responsibilities to the press. We are guilty of assuming that reporters understand complex school-community issues, and read, write and speak our language of "educanto." We often obscure the truth at best, and at worst some boards deliberately hide behind executive session doors to keep the public uninformed. But I think we should start from the premise that public business should be fully understood by the public at all times. So how do we do this? Briefly, we do it by open meetings; background briefings for reporters; clear, true stories in crisis; pictures of key people and places that are ready when they are needed; and of course open schools for the press. As a parent, I know one of the things that always annoyed me the most was going to visit the schools on the proper day when everybody expected you. Our schools are open at all times. The press is welcome at all times. We only ask that you announce your presence because sometimes we have to be a little suspicious about strangers on the grounds because not all strangers are there as friends.

One of the other difficulties with press reporting is that many of the education reporters are young and idealistic and believe that the schools are the magic solution to the future. I think one thing that could help the whole problem is a little maturity on the side of the press, a little tolerance of human frailty. And I say that because I so vividly remember recently a young man, a brand-new reporter, attending a board meeting at which I popped off about the volunteer firemen, which was a terrible thing to do. It was a time when the volunteer firemen wanted to put a fire house in the middle of the school yard, and I remarked that they could play with their fire engines and have

their clubhouse somewhere else. Well, that made the headlines, naturally. And for the next two weeks the letters-to-the-editors page was full every single issue with letters about the firemen hassle. But had the young man been a little more tolerant he would have understood that sometimes we get tired and say things we should not say. I deserved that publicity. I shouldn't have said it, but it would have been much better had he refrained from using that juicy bit. We are expecting, perhaps, in the education world, too much maturity from reporters, but we hope, always, that we can be of help to you. Things may be a little bit better if we remember what is said in First Corinthians: "Though I speak with the tongues of men and angels and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass or a tinkling cymbal."

Mr. Barzun: Thank you, Mrs. Reimers. We are all very grateful to you but we hope you are very careful about fire in the house. Is there any member of the panel who wants to address a question to one of the other members, or, failing a question, deliver an assault?

Mrs. Reimers: I wanted to quarrel a little bit with Mr. Maeroff because one of the things he said, or at least implied, was that he would blackball a certain college public relations department because they failed to jump to his request to see a student. I'm wondering if that is entirely fair. There could have been some very good reasons why they didn't meet your request.

Mr. Maeroff: In looking at it in the whole context of events, I judged that the public relations person at this university was trying to give me the slip and that he did not want to cooperate, and I measured him against his colleagues whom I work with at other universities, who I find do not try to be deceptive in that way—they may not be happy about something that a reporter is after but they don't operate that way. I meant to imply that in the future in dealing with this person—I am not blackballing the university but dealing with this person—I will certainly keep in mind that he was the kind of person who, in my judgment, because I thought he considered this to be adverse to the image of the university, did not choose to be helpful, but I judged that that was his intention in that case, and I just would relate to him in the future knowing that is how he operates.

Mrs. Reimers: Isn't that a misuse of power?

Mr. Maeroff: No, I think it's judicious and wise because I think one has to learn by experience. I am not trying to get him and stamp

him out for not cooperating with me. I thought that he was trying to be evasive and so I have to evaluate all that comes from him in terms of knowing that this is the way he dealt with me when I was after something that would not have put his university in a good light.

Mrs. Reimers: Do you feel there's ever a time when there is a duty *not* to report something?

Mr. Maeroff: Do you mean by a PR person?

Mrs. Reimers: Well, by anybody. Don't you think there is a time when no news is the best way to handle a situation?

Mr. Maeroff: Yes, it probably would have been good if the *Chicago Tribune* had not announced that the Americans had broken the Japanese code during World War II, and I can think of some other things.

Dr. Bottomly: I would like to ask Paul Woodring his opinion about the historical view of the printed press, the printed word. Some of the attacks on the press in the last few years have come from sources on high, but there is also a great deal of feeling by ordinary people that what they read is something they can't rely upon and that there should be some kind of a censorship. There have been polls taken that indicate that people are getting so disenchanted with the press, with what is reported, that they are even willing to go to the extent of allowing some kind of censorship. Do you see this, Paul, as something that is coming, and if so isn't it a tremendous threat to our sense of freedom and interpretation of the First Amendment?

Dr. Woodring: I can't really see any serious danger to freedom of the press in the long range, and I certainly wouldn't want to see any censorship. I do think we need a higher skill of professional ethics on the part of reporters and writers, and that the editor has a definite responsibility for seeing that some ethical principles are being upheld. In a national news magazine you certainly should hold writers responsible for telling the truth and for selecting fairly and honestly. My policy as an education editor was that our long-range responsibility was to the students getting an education in the schools. We would do what we thought in the long run would contribute most to their education. This is an editorial bias, if you wish. This does not mean that you should conceal things. It means that sometimes you should deliberately reveal things that temporarily might cause a setback, but in the long run your aim is better education. Your aim is

not just to make headlines, though. Your aim is not just to promote the magazine, not just to promote writers, and I certainly wouldn't be influenced in any way by what the advertisers think. I was lucky enough to work for a magazine that was pretty independent of what the advertisers thought. I don't think Norman Cousins ever, in any part of his magazine, allowed advertisers to influence what went into the magazine. I think he also had a strong sense of ethics. That does not really answer your question, but I don't see any very serious immediate threat here.

Mr. Barzun: On this issue of censorship I was struck by what Mrs. Reimers and Dr. Bottomly said, which amounted to a kind of indirect censorship exercised by the press over the official, the school superintendent, or the president of the school board. "You may not say this" and "you must not say that"—you are walking on eggs all the time lest your whole effectiveness in the job be endangered. Did I interpret you right?

Mrs. Reimers: That's absolutely right.

Mr. Barzun: So if we have to come to terms with the First Amendment about the press, which I think we should, we might throw that in at some point in the discussion.

Dr. Bottomly: I'd just like to add that I think that local newspapers are often less ethical and more ruthless in dealing with the local schools and local school officials than the national media are. Some of them are very rough on superintendents of schools.

Mr. Barzun: And what do you attribute that to?

Mrs. Reimers: Politics.

Dr. Bottomly: Well, it's politics in a broad and general sense. It often means that the local editor has some specific ax to grind and is looking for certain things and starts out with a definite bias. I think on a national magazine these biases get evened out a little more. Not always, but at least they may.

Mr. Macroff: Maybe he is trying to assert his independence, to demonstrate for everybody that he is independent, if he does what you say he does. I just wanted to throw in a word for responsibility, too, because I really do believe that it is very, very important for people who work in the news media to show responsibility. A lot of us sometimes forget the great impact that what we do may have. Dr. Bottomly

said that careers have been ruined, and certainly they have, and there must have been some that were ruined that shouldn't have been, be they in education, politics or in other fields. In connection with responsibility and in connection with another point that Dr. Bottomly made, and I thought much of his advice was quite excellent, he alluded to the problem with TV cameras, and this is the scourge of those of us who work in the pen-and-ink medium, because we are not very fond of TV cameras. TV cameras *make* news, they don't report news, and, unfortunately, too frequently they have provoked situations, they have entirely changed the whole tenor of what might have been, and it would be great if we could have invisible TV cameras for recording news, because they really do have a bad effect. They turn them on and everyone thinks they have to perform, and that just changes what is going on, really, and creates an unreal situation. And sometimes people who are in a position to decide whether or not there can be coverage of an event say, well, we will keep out *all* of the news media, and one of the reasons they may want to do that is because they are frightened of those TV cameras, and I can understand why. But then it has a bad effect on those of us who only carry pen and pad and not a TV camera.

Mr. Barzun: As for those education editors, perhaps it should become a rule that they have at all times at least two children of school age. Any other questions or remarks?

Meg Conner (member, all-volunteer public cable television group in Washington): I am interested in learning from this esteemed group what you feel are the trends for the future, what is going to be handled by the press in the near future, nationally, in education? What topics?

Mr. Maeroff: I will start it off. First of all, what's going to be covered is what's going to happen, which I tried to indicate before, and I really don't mean to be flip on that because a lot of the news just makes itself. I think that one thing that is probably going to be covered a great deal in coming years is the financing of education on the elementary-secondary level, as well as on the higher education level. I think that some major changes may be occurring in the not too distant future. We have had a number of suggestions by national panels about tuition charges, especially at the public institutions of higher learning, and something may come of that, and also out of the Rodriguez and Serrano cases we may see reforms throughout the fifty states, so I certainly could offer that as one area in which there will be a lot of news made in connection with education.

Dr. Bottomly: I think we will see a continuing struggle between the management of education and the people who work in the educational establishment as teachers and counselors and principals, even assistant superintendents. I think the labor strife is going to continue and maybe increase because the student population is leveling off, going down in some cases, and the competition for the jobs and for job security is going to become a greater issue on the part of employees in school business.

Mr. Maeroff: I would like to add one thing to what Dr. Bottomly said. Tenure, I think, is going to become more of an issue in connection with leveling-off college enrollments and declines—tenure and unionization of faculties, and the whole union question in connection with elementary and secondary schools.

Thomas C. Mendenhall (President, Smith College, and member of CBE's board of directors): I would like to get back, for a minute at least, to the very interesting discussion between Mrs. Reimers and Mr. Maeroff on responsibility. For instance, Mr. Maeroff, would you consider it proper for an institution not to allow the press to interview the rather desolated and overcome friends in a dormitory situation of a young woman—one of their classmates—who had been murdered off campus, not in the dormitory?

Mr. Maeroff: In other words, the institution would try to keep these people from the press?

Dr. Mendenhall: Yes. Or the press from them.

Mr. Maeroff: Well, I think that the institution has a right to try to do it, but I also think the news media have a right to try to reach those people.

Dr. Mendenhall: So it's a kind of a war at that point?

Mr. Maeroff: That's right. Yes.

Dr. Mendenhall: After one shooting has already happened.

Mr. Maeroff: I think the reporters should try to approach this in good taste and with some sort of responsibility, but still if, as I understand it, a shooting has occurred and it is certainly going to be reported, then the reporters are going to try to talk to all those they think might be able to shed some light on the situation. And you have your right to try to keep the reporters away from them.

Dr. Mendenhall: The police, of course, have already talked to everybody who had any connection with it.

Mr. Maeroff: The reporters are going to try and you may as well recognize that and at least try to bring about a situation in which it can be done as easily as possible.

Arthur Ciervo (Georgetown University, public relations): Having worked both sides of the fence I am a little disturbed by what Dr. Bottomly has said. I think that part of the problem stems from not what the press does but what the administration fails to do. All too many administrators think good press relations is only good news and consequently when something bad happens they don't level with the press. This creates special problems. I think in your particular case, when a reporter gave you the opportunity to speak, he was only trying to be objective, trying to give the story some balance. He is going to report it anyway. He is not coercing you into talking. What he is doing is simply giving you a chance to tell your side of the story, and I think it unwise to reject that particular offer. All too often I think administrators just don't want to communicate unless it is good news and I think that creates very special problems.

Dr. Bottomly: That's true, we school administrators want to look good, we want the school district to look good. There is a lot at stake, levies coming up and things of this type. But there *is* coercion. I either have to respond or be punished. This is the way it goes and I have found it is best to respond, as you say; give them a quote, say something. Do it with a little thought, however. A lot of times I have found platitudes coming out and as a result jargon slips in, and that's too bad. But I have found that there is a constant coercion on the part of many of the reporters to get their stories and get their quotes, and they like to get it from the top man, and unfortunately the top man, a lot of times, is not the best source of the information at that time.

Unidentified man: I direct my comments to Dr. Bottomly. I would like to say that my observations are from some historical base. I was in the Seattle community when you first came to Seattle, and, incidentally, I am quite an admirer of your ability. I do recall that when you first came on board in Seattle you made a comment to the effect that an administrator was in a secure position for something like three years. Now I am paraphrasing so you may want to correct me on this, but I believe you said that in your first year you are a pretty free agent, you are able to exercise your ideas and there is a lot of

forgiveness; that the second year you are starting to stabilize some of your thinking, you are stabilizing some of your action in the community, you are having an effect, and then beginning the third year your ideas are coming back to haunt you. You may want to correct my interpretation of what you had said, and it was some time back, but to what extent does the press play a role in coming back to haunt?

Dr. Bottomly: As a quick response I would say it is not so much the press coming back to haunt as quotes coming back to haunt in various ways by members of the public who are opposed to some policy that you have. And there is a flow of history here. You solve problems in one way at one particular time, and hopefully using the same general philosophy but different strategies at another particular time, you find some of these things dug out of old articles make it appear that you are being inconsistent with some former time. When I went to Seattle I thought it might be a soft job. I could look around the country and see all these superintendents of large school systems that had been there twenty, thirty, forty years. The following year all hell broke loose. The cities became in an uproar, over civil rights, over student confrontations. The human ecology in the cities added a great deal to the problems of the schools, and as a result I had to learn, and I think every other person in the urban movement had to learn, new tactics, new procedures and perhaps even a new value system that was based upon a more profound understanding of the dynamics of urban living and urban hostilities coming out of lost hopes and aspirations. So I would say that there is a tendency for things to come back and haunt you if you stay too long.

Abraham Kalish (Executive Secretary, Accuracy in Media, Inc.): This problem about the power of the news media intrigues me very much. I might say that our experience has been that there are very few groups, associations, industries or individuals that are not terrified by what the press can do to them. So much so that there are very few who will speak out, and as I look at it the only thing left now, perhaps, is a rearguard action. A few months ago, Roper published a report about the news media and I got the pamphlet, and the question was, as I recall it, what does the public think of the news media? And the news media, as a result of the questions they asked, came out smelling roses. Something like 60 per cent thought that they were either good to excellent. So I wrote to Mr. Roper—this was over a month ago—and I said, you didn't ask the gut question, and that gut question is the one that I think we should insist upon: if the news

media make an error, should they correct it? And I think if they asked the public that, they would get practically unanimous response that they should. . . .

Arthur Bestor (Professor of History, University of Washington, and member of CBE's board of directors): I am not addressing my question to Dr. Bottomly, but I do want to go on record as one of his admirers. I want to say a few things and ask a question about this supposed war between the responsible officials of the school system and the press. I think this is always, and properly, the relationship between the press and public figures. It is painful, certainly, but I think it is one of the risks that should be taken in getting at the essential facts, and I think more rather than less investigative reporting is in order. What I would like to talk briefly about, however, is what seems to me the opposite—the willingness to sort of play each other's games. The press is of necessity interested in the innovative as against the things that are going on ordinarily, and it seems to me that has had a subtle and dangerous effect—and I would like to ask the panel whether they agree—in putting a premium on some of these things, to the advantage and disadvantage of the schools, perhaps. I came in the plane with a scientist, a colleague of mine, who was commenting on the way in which grantsmanship is working. You have to apply, not for fundamental research, but you have got to say, this may produce the cure for cancer—which it might, any basic research might. It seems to me that we ought to consider the proposition that as teachers we aren't going to make the headlines with the ordinary things that we do, but we should not be deflected from doing them in order to get into the headlines and I think this applies even more, probably, to the administrators and public relations people than to the teacher. Is there, in your view—I perhaps address Mr. Maeroff and Dr. Bottomly—a danger in the premium placed upon innovation by the press? And the willingness of too many in the school system to go along with that attitude?

Dr. Bottomly: I agree with you. I think this has been the case, and we are guilty in school administration of promoting this sort of thing. But there has been, I think, for the last ten or twelve years in this country an increasing attack on the educational system, especially the common schools, kindergarten through grade twelve. It is coming around now more and more to the higher educational institutions, too. They are leaving us alone now more and more. But what we have done in response to that, I think, and in response to the

problems that we were facing at the time Sputnik went up and everybody was in an uproar over the lack of scientists and foreign language speaking people and mathematicians, we began to ballyhoo things in a very vigorous way. And I have been guilty of this, in order to gain public support, in order to pay the teachers and keep the programs going. I hope that we are now getting out of this, but I still see headlines of new, controversial programs starting here or there, and as Paul Woodring has indicated, many of these things were going on thirty and forty years ago.

Mr. Maeroff: I think that Professor Bestor's point is very well taken, that, as Dr. Bottomly says, there is a tendency for school people to ballyhoo the innovative and there is definitely a tendency for news media to report the innovative. And it could very well be that this sort of thing has the effect of making the traditional, which may or may not have worked—it certainly has worked in some cases—seem to be less important, or certainly less glamorous, and the whole idea of the word "news" to many people means looking for things that apparently are new. And some people think that if something isn't new, if it has been going on for a long time, regardless of whether or not it has been getting results, that that just is not what should be reported, that the other should be reported. And there are definitely dangers in that sort of thing.

James Conner (former senior associate for education, U.S. Chamber of Commerce): I was interested in the response to the question about trends. First of all, I would take some issue with the statement that trends would be based on what is going to happen. I think trends in large part are based on what has already happened. But that aside, I was interested that the two trends that were identified really have very little to do with educational programs. On the one hand we were talking about tenure and labor-management disputes, and on the other we were talking about school finance. I am interested to know if anyone has enough prescience to identify trends in regard to curriculum.

Dr. Bottomly: I would like in general terms to say a few words about that. It seems to me you are right. We have to look to the past and what happened up to this point in order to look into the future. I see a couple of things that are going to influence curriculum, anyway. One is the problem of the energy crisis, the problems of the destruction of our resources, and I think our curriculum development process

is going to have to address itself to how we are going to use the remaining resources on this planet and who is going to use them and what priorities will be given. Secondly, I think another thing I see coming in the future is in relationship to how we are going to get along with one another. This is human relations. I have been caught up in the hostility of people against people for so long, I think that our survival in the midst of the crises that we are going to continue to face is going to call for curriculum innovations in human relations such as we have never seen before.

Mrs. Reimers: I think you are going to see the usual cycle of trends. We have gone through a period where the intellectual was honored, and past that into an era where the world of work is the most important, the non-college bound student is the one whose curriculum is under closest scrutiny. I believe that this is going to swing back again to emphasis upon intellectual achievement, without at the same time completely sacrificing the vocational view. As I see the curriculum in the near future, it is going to have more of a balance than it has in the past. We seem, in the schools, to be fairly typical of everything else in this country, swinging wildly from one idea to the other, back and forth, but as far as the actual course content is concerned I do not think that changes so very much as we would like to believe it does from year to year. Maybe that is a happy thought in this basic education group.

Sereck H. Fox (emeritus professor, Wayne State University, and member of CBE's board of directors): Isn't it a point to remember that the press is a business, and as a business must sell more newspapers?

Dr. Woodring: I do not think the press is just a business. We do not guarantee freedom of the press in order to make it a business. I think the press also has a responsibility that goes way beyond business, and while somebody in the office has to worry about circulation and about making money, the reporter and the editor should be relatively free of the pressures of business. Otherwise, the free press doesn't really deserve to be free, if it is simply working as a business for the benefit of other businesses.

Mr. Macroff: I more or less agree with that, and I would add that I would not make too much out of the business thing. The press is not trying to sensationalize or exploit some of these things because of a business nature. This is more or less fallacious in most situations

because if you look at the majority of the papers in this country you will see they really have little competition from other papers, their circulation is rather steady and it is going to stay the same. The vast amount of their circulation is by home delivery and it is not going to go up or down that much on a given event that is reported, so I wouldn't make too much out of the business thing. The effect of the press being a business does have other kinds of effects, I'm not arguing that, but in terms of how the press approaches educational reporting, I don't think that that really has too much effect.

Mr. Barzun: So the sin doesn't come from greed but from an excessive desire to please?

Mr. Macroff: Well, maybe in some cases.

Mr. Barzun: It is too bad to have to cut off the discussion, but we made a promise about the time of termination. I know that I speak for all of you when I thank our panelists for their devotion, concentration and expository skill, and I thank you for coming to hear them.

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